



Chris Hoff

Freelance Reporter & Producer

Home Media: 91.7 KALW Public Radio, San Francisco, CA
Guest Media: Bayerischer Rundfunk, Munich

Chris Hoff is a 29-year-old freelance journalist from San Francisco, but it took him some time to get to this point. He graduated from Cornell University in 2002 with a B.A. in Classics (Greek and Latin). From 2002 to 2006, he lived in Weimar and Berlin, Germany, working in multiple capacities: English Teacher at The Bauhaus University Weimar; Freelance Translator (German-English); Travel Guide contributor (Berlin); Assistant at a German-American political organization “Atlantik-Bruecke” (Berlin); and Journalism Intern at both *Deutsche Welle TV* (Berlin) and *CNN International* (Berlin). After four years abroad, however, his “Americanness” began calling him again: Chris realized he was lacking some fundamental intellectual and expressive outlets that a different language-culture cannot provide,

so he decided to move back to San Francisco in 2006.

Since the move Chris has been working as a reporter/producer almost exclusively with *KALW* public radio in San Francisco. As a reporter, he is free to cover an eclectic array of stories: from San Francisco health care policy, to emancipated foster youth; from a unique city policy against chain stores, to the merging industries of agriculture and urban sewage disposal.

Chris is grateful for having received the 2009 Arthur F. Burns Fellowship. With it he will have the chance as a journalist to revisit Germany and investigate facets of the country much more in depth than he ever could have while he lived there.

Report by Chris Hoff

I spent my two months as a 2009 Arthur F. Burns Fellowship recipient in Munich at the Bayerischer Rundfunk. I worked exclusively in radio and mainly for the show “RadioWelt,” a world news magazine on the Bayern 2 channel. The experience generally was positive and worthwhile.

Since I come from a relatively small public radio station in San Francisco (KALW) that focuses on local news, I was limited in the kinds of stories about Germany that my home station would air. There were indeed a few that I could do for KALW, but I found myself doing most of my work in German for the RadioWelt. This was possible only because I knew German pretty well going into the fellowship. All the other American fellows this year were in print media and, since translators were at their disposal, they were not required really to know the language to get their work published in German newspapers. For radio and TV, which are media that rely on the spoken word, having one’s work done in English and then translated is not possible, for the journalist must actually *speak* his parts. To sum, I was very grateful as a radio journalist for having a firm grasp of German before entering into this fellowship. I believe that had I been relegated to doing my work only in English, my output would have been limited significantly.

At the same time, it is definitely not *required* that one know German. Most fellows in the past, even people in radio, knew little to none, and yet they managed to get stuff done. So I suppose it depends a lot on what type of person you are. For my part, I like to feel part of the “team,” so to speak, and not completely on my own. To that end I was glad I knew German before heading off to the Bayerischer Rundfunk.

Working for the RadioWelt specifically at the Bayerischer Rundfunk was a great experience. Several of the core staffers for this department had participated in past Burns fellowships and so knew the situation I was in. They, along with the other colleagues, were very welcoming of me and did their best to throw assignments my way. They saw my being American as an advantage and gave me stories to work on in which I could exploit this. Within the first three days of my employment there, for example, one of the moderators did a pre-recorded interview with me on the issue of race in the US via the Obama Beer Summit (this was a story from July 2009 where Professor Gates, a black professor of Harvard University, was arrested outside his home by a white police officer on unfounded charges. Obama was quoted later as publicly denigrating

the white police officer; a week later the three men met at the white house for a beer to talk the situation over).

It was also interesting for me to see how such a large radio station functions: compared to local stations in the US, the Bayerischer Rundfunk is enormous. It has 5 separate frequencies and thousands of staffers and freelancers. I am quite sure it dwarfs even NPR. The amount of content it puts out every day is staggering, and to see how this process works, which is exceedingly different from how KALW operates, was fascinating to me.

Despite the enormity of the Bayerischer Rundfunk, I found the work atmosphere to be rather personal and intimate. Each department or show is deeply focused on itself. As a result, you get to know well the people in your immediate milieu; and they are more than willing to help you out by referring you to local experts or to people in house that know something about whatever topic you are researching. Of course, you are required to be vocal and to take initiative if you want to do anything, but assuming you can do that, things ought to run smoothly.

Allow me to discuss few practical points for incoming Burns fellows stationed in Munich. Finding an apartment, much less an affordable one, is not easy. I took the fellowship's advice and eventually found one via the website <http://www.wg-gesucht.de/>, but I had to settle for a dorm room in a Studentenwohnheim. However, since the chances are that you do not know much about Munich going in and where the good districts to stay in are, I might suggest contacting some former Burns alums in Munich to help you out. They might even know of a sublet you could rent. Some people I found especially nice and helpful are: Nicole Hirsch, Stefan Maier, Barbara Leidl, Doris Isabel, and Torsten Teichmann. I would also highly recommend getting a bike and using that as your principal mode of transportation. The U- and S-bahns are expensive in Munich, and the city is actually quite small, making a bike the fastest and cheapest way (50 EUR for a used one) to get around. It also, in my opinion, lets you acquaint yourself with the city much better than public transportation. This goes for Berlin too, should one be stationed there.

For getting around within Germany, note that the trains are rather expensive. A much cheaper alternative is the extensive ride-share system Germany has. It can be found at www.mitfahrgelegenheit.de.

In all I am very pleased that I had the chance to take part in the Arthur F. Burns Fellowship. It was gratifying to do work in a foreign language and to get to know something about a culture quite different from my own (I had lived in Germany before for a few years, but in Berlin. Bavaria is definitely not Berlin). It was also great meeting the other German and American fellows. I trust that I will remain in contact with them for years to come.

Audio Contributions

In order to listen to the audio contributions, either click on the music buttons or browse the folder “audios” on the CD.

Amerikanische Touristen in Bayern

touristen.mp3

Eindrücke vom deutschen Wahlkampf 2009

wahlkampf.mp3

Hawaiihemd

hawaiihemd.mp3

Interview zu Rassismus in den USA (rw 3, July 31, 2009)

rassismus.mp3

Mein erstes Mal auf dem Oktoberfest

oktoberfest.mp3

Schwarzenegger's Hometown

schwarzenegger.mp3